

THE LAST OF THE GHOSTS

By Barrett Wendell.

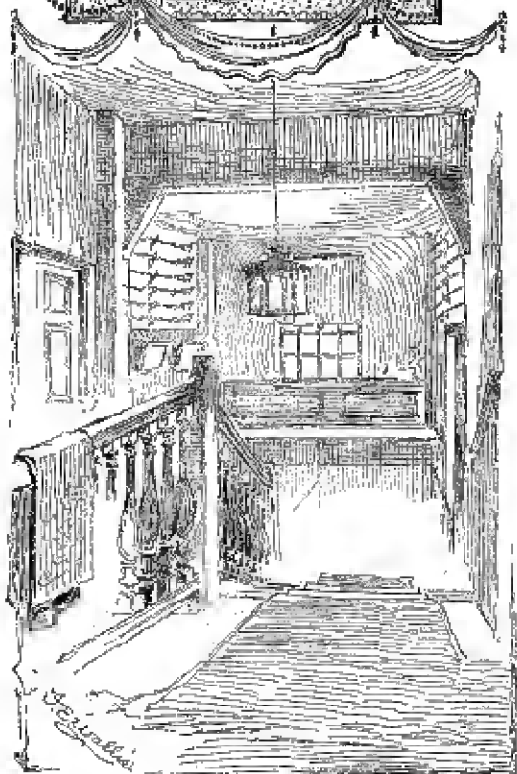
I.

D

OWN

on the coast of New England, in sight of the open sea, is an old house. A royal governor built it, who has left behind relics of his provincial grandeur. In the garrets, to this day, are some rusty flint-locks, captured, as the story goes, at Louisburg, and brought back in triumph to arm his body-guard—a troop of which no other authentic record survives. There is a full-length portrait of him, too, in red coat and powdered wig, and the embroidered waistcoat still preserved by descendants of his family, who delight in pointing out that the back is made of satin as fine as the front. Some of his silver is shown, into the bargain, engraved with the florid coat of arms that is cut on his gravestone in the neighboring town. Altogether, he was a very great man, who may by no means be forgotten.

Whoever sees the old house, then, falls to thinking with respectful sentimentality about the glorious days of His Excellency. Nowadays the place is much the worse for wear. The Revolution confiscated it, I believe. At all events, it has been so long in the hands of everyday folks that few visible traces of its



pristine grandeur remain. Its gray wooden walls shed their last flake of paint years ago; the orchard that stood about it—or rather what stray trees had survived the storms of a century or more—went for firewood when the Temperance Movement so gravely threatened the trade in cider; and what little of the garden has not been ploughed and sowed for years by the farmers who have tried to make the land pay something, has long been a mere tangled mass of weeds, among which a few old-fashioned flowers forlornly try to preserve an air of respectability.

For all its decay, perhaps all the more because of it, the place preserves a character of its own. You cannot see the big chimneys rising sturdily above the irregular, weather-beaten roofs; you cannot enter the panelled council-chamber, with its carved chimney-piece—the master work of some dead maker of figure-heads; you cannot look at the old flock paper that still hangs in what was once the drawing-room, or peer into the queer cupboards, or up the cramped stairways without visions of men and times that are dead and gone. Very unimaginative folks fall to talking of the pompous old fellow who built the place; and tell, with what authority I know not, of his gardens and his chariots, and the barge in which he used to come down river in state and land at the stone pier where for fifty years there has not been water enough at half tide to float a dory. There are stories, too, of sudden summons of the king's council, to drink the health of George the Second in the big council-chamber, whence they might be carried supine to bed up a dark staircase inaudible from the more domestic parts of the house; and tales of how after such bouts his hot-tempered excellency would sit in a broad arm-chair on a kind of balcony, long since roofed over and made into a garret, where a high wooden wall shielded him from the sea-breeze, and the afternoon sun warmed the swollen veins that he had cooled over night with Madeira.

Naturally enough, people suppose that a great deal is known of the old governor, whose name is a household word. But, when you look into the matter you find that beyond certain

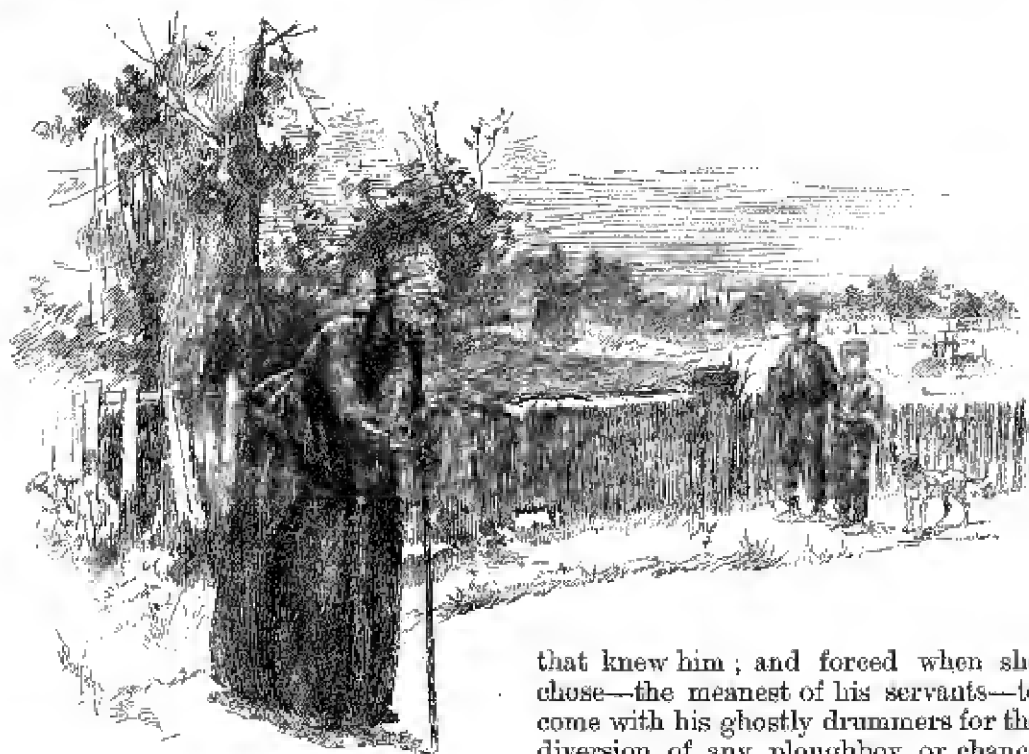
dull official documents he has left no certain record behind him. What manner of man he really was there is no writer of letters or diaries to tell us. Indeed the only fact I have learned of him with any color of authenticity, is at once not exactly about him as he lived, and—if we may believe the fading traditions of his vice-regal pomp—queerly out of character. It is a story, half believed by elderly people in the neighborhood, that his ghost would sometimes prowl about the old place at the bidding of an uncanny negress who survived well into the nineteenth century.

She was one of those strange Africans who outlive generations of their masters until, for all that anybody rightly knows, they may count their age by centuries. Certainly she was once a slave, legally purchased by His Excellency himself, and duly manumitted, for long and faithful services, by his last will and testament. Certainly, too, she was the last living being who remembered him in the flesh. But what her memories may have been she seems never to have told. Bent half double, she would cower over her stove in winter; and in summer would sometimes hobble out into the sunshine, blinking about with small eyes, buried beneath her white wool in nut-like wrinkles. It was useless to question her about the old times. She made no coherent answers but stood staring at whoever spoke, wagging her shrivelled head, and mumbling strange savage words or crazy nothings. At least this was all that people could generally get out of her. But sometimes, report goes, when a present put her in rare good humor, or perhaps a warmer sun than usual kindled some fading sentiment of the tropical life for which heaven had made her, she roused herself into something like human intelligence. At these times she would lay her skinny paw on the arm of whoever pleased her, and ask if he would like to see the old governor. And if, with half-frightened curiosity, he answered yes, she would bid him go secretly that night and stand just outside the door of the old council-chamber.

"Den I'll sit and tink of him, honey, —tink of him all alone. And bime-by, sure as you're 'live, you 'll see him walk in, jes' as gran'—"

On such occasions, it is still asserted, whoever took his stand in front of the old door, disused of late years, which in the governor's time admitted official visitors to the state apartments, would have a curious adventure. For a while,

It came to be believed, then, that by some ironical caprice of fate, the stout old governor, whose will had been law for thirty years, was subject, in his cushioned coffin, to the bidding of the crazy witch who alone survived of all



all would be quiet, save for the night-sounds that bear men company wherever they go, and for the distant murmur of the sea breaking on the reefs and beaches beyond the harbor-mouth. By and by, this sound would grow half articulate, until it came to seem like a rolling of drums instead of pebbles. At last, of a sudden, the drums would roll very loud, as though a gust of wind puffed the noise towards you. And then, in the vague star-light, the old door would disappear as if by magic, and through the portal would strut a pompous little gentleman with a white wig, which gleamed for an instant as he removed his cocked hat on the threshold. The moment he passed in the vision would disappear; the drums would have faded back into the distant sound of surf, and the old door, whither the startled spectator hurried, would be found tightly fastened with the rusty nails that had held it to for so long.

that knew him; and forced when she chose—the meanest of his servants—to come with his ghostly drummers for the diversion of any ploughboy or chance traveller who happened to please her.

At last, those who tell this story say, a man who lived in the house—and oddly enough gave no credence to tales of the ghostly rambles of his distinguished predecessor—was aroused one night by footsteps in the council-chamber, which was commonly kept locked. Surmising that mischievous boys were about, he had taken his gun, loaded for such a purpose with powder, and had stamped down to the scene of disturbance. Here, to his terrified amazement, he had found no human intruders, but a shadowy company of bewigged gentlemen, seated, in the light of a lurid fire which had risen in the empty chimney, about a square table. At the head was the old governor himself, bending his dew-lapped cheeks over a wine glass, which he solemnly filled from a decanter engraved with his arms. As the spectator looked on, the glass was filled, and His Excellency arose, not too steadily, with

the air of one about to propose a toast, while his guests, whose backs were turned to their unbidden companion, bent politely forward, glasses in hand. What he would have said can never be known. Thoroughly alarmed, the looker-on raised his gun and blazed away at the spectres, who vanished in the powder smoke.

there from the day when the royal governor first sat down to dinner in his new hall you feel, whenever you see the place, and the more you see it the more you feel, that here men have lived and died and passed into memories that are forgotten. Be you dull as you may, it sets you dreaming.



Then the assailant turned and ran—and from that time forth would never enter the council-chamber after dark. But his fears seem to have been groundless. On that very night, it appeared, old Dinah lay dying. And with her died not only the last surviving memories of His Excellency, but also the pompous spectre with which she used to entertain her favorites.

These tales, and perhaps a few more such, were the most authentic that I could find about the old house. What haunts it is not, I think, any definite tradition; but rather the atmosphere of tradition that gives to old places the quality we call romantic. More than if you knew just what had been doing

II.

A MILE or two from the old house, across the creek that ebbs and flows past the ruinous sea-wall fringed with rock-weed, is a fishing village, whose snug well-to-do houses cluster like barnacles on the low ledges that form the mouth of the river. Here I have passed much time, and so came to know Captain John Trefethen.

The first time I saw him, I remember, was in the shop which serves at once for bazar, club-room and post-office to the tavernless town. It was about noon, one summer day, and the mail was due. The dingy little building, with an overgrown stove in the middle, and a queer

medley of counters, and barrels, and boxes, and merchandize of all kinds from spools and candy to anchors, was crowded with solemn-looking fishermen, mostly well on in life, sitting on whatever came handy, and talking as gravely as senators. When I appeared, such silence fell on the company that I should have felt uncomfortable, but for Captain John. He was a lank old Yankee, dressed in rusty blue flannel, and a stained Panama hat. He sat in one corner of the shop resting his hands, which carelessly held a pair of frayed cotton gloves, on an ivory-headed stick. And with his curling white hair, and long chin beard, and twinkling little blue eyes he made quite a figure. His rustic dandyism had dignity. You felt instinctively that his black cloth boots were not laughed at by the wearers of monstrous cow-hides who sat around him, but were rather regarded as the proper daily apparel of a distinguished person. As I looked at him, he nodded with a friendly smile that displayed a palpably false set of teeth, and invited me to sit down. From that time the fishermen accepted me as a normal fact.

Still I knew little of sea-faring, or local politics and scandal; and they talked of little else. So it fell out that when I went for my mail, I would sit on a coil of rope beside Captain John. After a while we grew good friends. He had been to sea in days when such business meant more than creeping along from one coast port to another. He had learned from something better than hearsay that the world does not end with the rocky islands that float on the horizon just off the harbor-mouth. But for all that he knew more of life than his neighbors, he talked less. The secret of his attraction, I think as I remember him, lay in his affable silence. When anybody spoke, Captain John would look at him in a friendly way and at most utter in his slow Yankee voice some brief commonplace. I do not remember a single phrase of his worth repeating; but I hardly ever bade him goodbye without feeling that between us knowing things had been said.

When the mail was distributed and the company dispersing for their noon-day dinner, I would sometimes walk

home with him. Once, I remember, he asked me into his neatly-kept cottage. But here he grew rather stiff. Instead of taking me to the kitchen, where he mostly lived, he insisted on ushering me into his darkened parlor, reserved for state occasions. And my call, when I was fairly seated in the hair-cloth rocking-chair, assumed the character of a solemn function. So I never repeated it.

I carried away, however, a pleasant impression of the thrifty little place. In spite of its country primness, the room had an attraction of its own. There was a staring Brussels carpet, to be sure, and hair-cloth furniture, and wax flowers; but there were some placid Indian idols too, and great shells from the South Seas, and along with some gilt-edged subscription books a row of battered old volumes that looked worth the reading they had evidently seen; there was a marvellously bright accordeon, too.

"Taint much of an instrument, I s'pose," said the old captain as he saw me looking at it, "but it used to sound pleasant at sea, sir, and I like to have it round. That one's never been played on. My old one ain't fit to be seen."

I left him soon, with some formal words about the pleasant look of his home.

"It's quiet," he said, "That's what I like now. Didn't use to; but as I get on I begin to see things different."

But if Captain John was awkward in the presence of so unusual a phenomenon as a visitor, he kept all his old affability at the post-office, where he could permit himself the luxury of silence. So, like everybody else, I said to him whatever came into my head. It was natural, then, that one morning, when I had lately been at the old house, and still felt its fascination, I should begin to talk of it to him.

I had come late for my mail that crisp autumn day, and met him on his way home from the post-office. He waited for me, I remember, at his gate, and stood leaning against the white fence that kept stray cattle out of his bright little flower garden. Of course his first question was how I had been lately. This I answered by telling him where I had been; and asking him if he knew the old house well.

"Used to," he said curtly, "But I ain't been up there for some years."

Hardly noticing that his tone was not so affable as usual, I went on talking of what charm the place had for me, even though I knew nothing of its real history, if indeed there were any to know. It was a spot, I said in one of those phrases that formed themselves when I talked to Captain John and went so far to make me take to him, where, without knowing why, you felt as if the dead were not dead after all, but only gone away.

"You ain't seen her, hev ye?" he asked suddenly.

I looked up in surprise. His face had lost its canny Yankee good-nature, and had instead a look of anxious trouble. I asked whom he meant.

"Seems as though she ought to rest quiet now," he went on, without answering. "You aint seen her—hev ye?"

I had seen nobody, I said; I had no idea what he meant. Whereat, without a word of greeting, the old fellow turned, and roughly dashed open his white gate and hobbled up the pebbly garden path, and so out of sight around the corner of his cottage.

III.

IN that part of the country there are few old graveyards. Nowadays, to be sure, each town has its cemetery filling with granite-bordered lots and veined marble monuments. But in old times the farmers, and the sailors, and the fishermen were content to rest each in some rocky corner of his own land. So now, when you wander through the fields and pastures, you often stumble on little mounds, buried in golden-rod and juniper, and all manner of wild shrubs and flowers, that half hide the slate headstones, if indeed there be any stone to preserve the name of the dead.

The custom seems painful to many; but for me it has charm. When these simple folk died, they were laid to rest in land they knew and called their own; they mingle with dust they cared for; so long as they are remembered they may be found in places where they moved in life; and when they are forgotten they are left to a quiet that is

like absorption in the very nature they lived in. Sometimes, when I come to one of these neglected graves, I catch glimpses of an eternity less unwelcome than what confronts you in neat cemeteries. For an instant I seem to know how the mossy rocks, and the restless ocean beyond the meadow, and the bright wild flowers, and the twisted trees, and men with all their works, and the stars that watch us, are but kindred forms of one vast, changing, changeless being.

But even to philosophers such glimpses as these are few and fleeting. As for me, when the first thrill of reverence passes, human curiosity generally impels me to look for names. Thus it was that a few days after my abrupt parting with Captain John I discovered what he meant. It was a pleasant autumn afternoon; I had rowed past the old house, which looked gravely down at the creek from amid a forest of lilacs. Swept on by the tide I had pulled lazily up the winding channel, now shut in by gray, rocky shores where stunted pines try to grow, now passing open pastures that slope gently up to higher woods. Here and there a cottage, or a weather-stained farm-building nestled among the trees and weeds. Sometimes a foot-path led down the bank to a rough wharf, or a tumble-down fish-house that spoke of more active days in those waters where now the stroke of your oar surprises the drowsy fish. After a while I came to a broken dam that once shut in the tide for a mill burnt down years ago. Here I rested, for the channel above was choked with eel-grass; and the banks widened into a broad salt meadow, dotted with hay stacks surmounting little clumps of piles. Before long the tide would turn; rather than pull back against the current that soon would float me home, I made fast my boat, and clambered through a thicket and over the moss-gathering mill stones up the bank.

Beyond the bushes was an open pasture, with tempting walnut-trees on the farther side. I made my way towards them. Not far off, two or three cows were gathered by a clump of bushes, close to the bars where they were waiting for their master. As I approached, one of them moved away from something against which she had been com-

fortably rubbing her dun side, and switching her tail stirred the tall weeds enough to show that the allayer of her irritation was a slate head-stone, tilted to one side by the frosts of thirty or forty winters. I stopped to see who lay there; and read that it was Drusilla, wife of Jno Trefethen, who departed this life on the 17th of October, 1838, aged 22 years, 7 months, and 16 days.

"Dear sister, mother, wife and friend,
Here in the dust you lie
Your sorrowing friends have laid you here
To bid the world good-bye."

So ran the epitaph, if I remember rightly. The stone is broken now. Some harder frost than usual, or some particularly uncomfortable cow, has pushed it over, and in its fall the rhyme has been broken. When I went thither, a little while ago, I could not find the whole of it.

As I knelt in the weeds before the lonely stone, wondering whether the Jno Trefethen whose wife lay under it could be my old friend, I heard a voice behind me. Turning I saw at the bars the country fellow who had come for the cows. I knew him a little. He was a big, lumbering, red-bearded man of thirty or so, who had lived all his life in the old governor's house, which had been decaying in the possession of his family for two or three generations. He lounged heavily against the top rail on which his arms were crossed. He looked big and black against the western sky, whence the afternoon sun streamed about him.

"Seed her th'other night," he drawled in that aggressive tone with which a Yankee forestalls incredulity or other differences of opinion.

"Saw whom?" I asked.

"Aunt Drusilly," said he. "She walks down to the house. Used to skeer folks; but Lord, there ain't no harm in her. Never was, 's fur as I've heerd."

IV.

I LEFT my boat by the old dam in the eel-grass, and walked slowly down the grassy road with Tom. On the way, as he drove home the lazy cows, he told what he knew about Drusilla.

She was his father's sister, born at the old house soon after his family bought it. At that time they were less rude in their lives than they have grown in fifty years of ill-luck and hardship. But the hardship began almost as soon as she was big enough to remember. Before she was ten years old her mother died; and the little woman found more serious work on her hands than chasing fowls among the bushes, and clambering into the gnarled apple-trees. There were younger children, of whom Tom's father was one; and nobody else to look after them. So Drusilla had to work and worry, like a grown woman born to such things, while stiff portraits of wigged and furbelowed ancestors followed her reprovingly with their painted eyes. For, to this day her family having little else to be proud of, fondly remember that in the time of His Excellency, her great-grandfather was a member of the King's council. Her surviving progenitor helped her little more than the dead ones; from all Tom could learn of him he was not much of a fellow.

"Guess he took more'n was good for him right along," he said. "That's what was the end of him anyhow. Got tipped out of a dory rowin' down from the city when my father warn't but twenty years of age. Never found the remains."

For several years, then, the little housewife had her hands full. She did her best; she kept the children alive and in some kind of order; and cooked, and sewed and picked up what little education she could find in the damaged calf-bound books that remained from her great grandfather's library. And through it all she managed to grow so pretty that when she was seventeen, and Tom's father eight or ten, she was the prettiest girl for miles around.

"Tleast," said Tom prudently, "That's what father used t'say. But, then, he thought a sight of Aunt Drusilly, and I dunno but what his jedgment might 'a' got a little mite tilted."

However this may have been, she was pretty enough to attract admirers, who disturbed the balance of her simple life. She grew careless and flighty. She thought more about dress, and less about the children, who, with the quick jealousy of their years, proceeded to take

men into high disfavor. Among these objects of juvenile displeasure John Trefethen was the most marked. He would often row over of an evening from the village where he lived ; and after a while Drusilla evidently was more upset when he did not turn up, than when he did, and generally by no means herself at times when he might be expected.

"Th' old Cap'n was mighty good lookin' in them days," said Tom. "Dunno but what you might call him so now. An' he was a terrible fellow with the girls. Kep' it up late in life, too."

At last Drusilla grew very sharp and cross with the children, who were not slow in answering, and at times, Tom guessed, the old house wasn't much better than a hornet's nest. The phrase pleased me ; with its gray, weather-stained shingles, and its queer labyrinth of rooms and closets and stairways and passages and garrets, it looks like one to this day.

One night, when her father was away on some coasting voyage, Drusilla was unusually cross, and sent the children to bed early. She had a way, Tom said, of making 'em mind. So Tom's father went to bed as he was told, in such a temper that he could not sleep. He heard some one come to the house, he heard Drusilla welcome the visitor, and he recognized in the gruff answer the voice of John Trefethen. Then they went into the house. The little boy tossed about in bed for a while, straining his ears, as one does at night, and frightening himself with the ghostly cracklings and sighings that pervade old houses. At last he worried himself into real terror ; and convinced that if he remained alone much longer some supernatural visitant would proceed to extremities with him, he stealthily arose, and slipped down-stairs to the region of the kitchen, where human aid was within call. The first thing he heard was Drusilla, crying as if her heart would break. And John Trefethen was roughly telling her not to be a fool.

These positive sounds were quite enough to drown the mournful minor tones of the voices of the night. Full of angry excitement, the little fellow listened at the door, and made out that John was going on a long voyage, to

Calcutta or some such place ; and Drusilla begging him not to leave her that way ; and John answering very roughly. In a little while he heard John's heavy boots stamping towards the outer door. Drusilla hastened after him.

"John," she cried, "John, don't leave me this way."

"Damn it," said John, "what's the good of being a fool? You ain't the first that's been left, nor you won't be the last." And he slammed the door behind him ; while Drusilla sank down with a sob.

The little boy, in his white nightgown went gliding like the very ghosts he had been so afraid of, down through a dark passage, and through the shadowy council-chamber, where the old portraits peered at him in the darkness, and out through the long music room, where the stringless spinnet stood that the governor's lady used to play on, and so through a little back door to the wharf where John's dory lay swinging in the tidal current. In a moment John Trefethen stamped round the corner of the house, nervously whistling a country tune.

"John Trefethen," said the boy.

"My God!" exclaimed John, stopping short, "who's that?"

"It's me," said the boy. "What have you been doin' to my sister?"

"Nothing," said John reassured. "Go to bed, you —— little fool."

"I won't," said the boy, "not until I've talked to you."

"Guess I've heard talk enough for one night," said John. "Get out o' my way."

"No, I won't," said the boy. "And just you mind this. If you do any harm to my sister, I'll kill you."

"Like to see you try," said John, pushing him aside.

The boy picked up a stone, and flung it with all his might at his enemy. John dodged it with a rude laugh. Snatching up a stick, the boy dashed at him and struck him in the face. In a rage John struck back, and laid the little fellow senseless on the stones.

In a moment more John had picked the child up, and was carrying him tenderly back to the house. He came round the corner again, past the council-door where old Dinah used to call back

the dead governor, and under the drawing-room windows that had not been lighted for years. When he came in sight of the kitchen, where he had left Drusilla, he saw that the girl had opened

After a while, John came back from his voyage with marvellous stories of the Indies, and barbaric presents for the whole family. The few weeks he passed at home were full of happy excitement



the door, and stood with the light behind her, peering into the night. He laid his burden on the ground, and stepped forward. The girl heard him coming; she sprang toward him in the dark, and threw her arms round his neck.

"Oh, John," she cried, nestling close to him, "I knew you couldn't leave me that way. You couldn't, could you?"

The end of it all was that within less than a week the boy was well, and John and Drusilla were man and wife, and he off before the mast for Calcutta. Things in the old house went on as before. Some months after John sailed away, though, a baby came to remind them of him; and Drusilla's small brothers and sisters vied with each other in lavishing on the new-comer attentions that in some degree repaid what the little mother had done for them.

for Drusilla. But John was too much of a sailor to relish prolonged domestic happiness. Before long he was off again, this time for more than two years. After the first few months he gave up writing; and Drusilla did not say much, but as Tom put it, "she aged considerable."

At last her father came home with a paper which told them that John's ship had arrived in New York,—a piece of news that brightened up Drusilla incredibly. She went about singing as she used to in the old times; she hurried through a new dress for the child, and spruced some of her own finery, expecting every minute that John would come. But no John came, and no letter, and what it meant nobody could tell. At last a shipmate of his turned up in the neighboring town with news that as soon as John had been paid off he had started on a

regular spree, and had last been seen in a dance-hall, drunker, as Tom put it, than the Medes and Persians.

At this news Tom's father swore vengeance, and even Drusilla's father, who ought to have sympathized with John's weakness, was so much moved that he proceeded to get very drunk in turn. But Drusilla said hardly anything. Only she would stand every day at the kitchen door, looking wistfully up the road between what trees were left of the old orchard, while her child played neglected at her feet. Somehow she had never seemed to care as much for her own child as she had for the little ones her mother left her. And now these had outgrown her; they needed her no more, and were quite able to look after the baby, who cared more for them than for her. She didn't talk much, Tom repeated, but she grew very ill-tempered, which wasn't surprising.

Still no news came of John, and weeks had gone by. At last, one day, after standing as usual by the door for a long time, she shook her head mournfully, and went into the house.

Before very long, they heard a jolly voice talking to the baby; and hurrying out, they found John, come home with the aggressive air of one who does not mean to answer questions.

"Where's Drusilla?" he asked, when he had kissed her sisters. They heard a foot-step in the kitchen. Drusilla appeared at the door. She was pale as death.

"Oh, John," she murmured, "if I'd known you'd come I wouldn't 'a done it." And she sank into John's arms.

The poor child had taken poison. An hour later she was dead. They buried her in the pasture where I saw her gravestone.

That was Drusilla's story. In telling it Tom had rambled so far from the visitations that had started him on the tale that I had to remind him of it. Who had seen her? I asked.

Lots of folks, he said, always in the same place. She would come just as she came the other night. Somebody approaching the kitchen door would see there a white figure shaking its head. As the looker-on approached, the shape would totter forward and finally would

sink into the earth, much as poor Drusilla had tottered and fallen for the last time into her husband's arms.

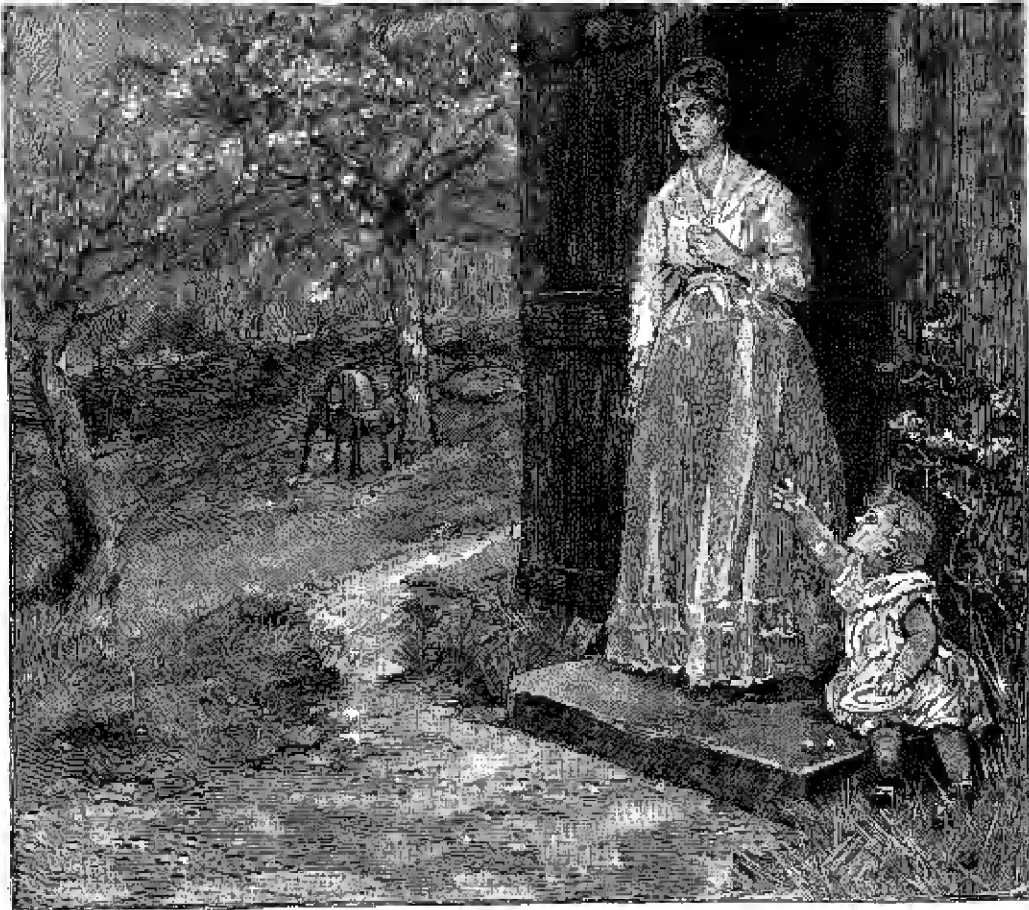
"Folks say," said Tom, "that she comes there when the old Cap'n gets thinking about her. He was awful impressed when she died, and hung round for a time kind of stupid-like, and then went off and got drunk. An' one day, when he was off my father seed Aunt Drusilly, just like she was that last time. Well, when the Cap'n come back again, he says, 'it's no use,' says he, 'the more I took the more I kep' thinkin' o' the way she come and said, *John, I wouldn't a done it.*' So he set to work; and went to sea again, and at times, I callate he lived mighty hard. But 'twarn't no good, whenever he come home he kep' sayin' that do what he would he couldn't get Drusilly out of his head. And every now and then, all the time, folks would see her standin' there in the kitchen door. Well, at last, time went on, and old Cap'n got on in life, and settled down over to the village, and begun to live quieter, and one day he asks my father, kind o' timid, if anybody'd seen her lately. 'No,' says my father, 'not this year or more.' 'Well,' says the Cap'n, 'the quieter I live the less I think about her the way she looked that day. Seems as though by livin' quiet I kind o' help her rest.'"

"But how about the other night?" I asked.

"Well," said Tom, "that's queer, that is. Next day, old Cap'n rowed over t' see us; and we didn't say nothin' to him about it, but he let out that some darned fool had been talkin' t' him about her and put her in his head the old way."

V.

THE next time I saw Tom was a cold, clear winter evening. I had come down to the town nearest the house whence I was to drive myself to the village where Captain John lived. Just as I was tucking myself into a small sleigh, I heard some one hail me by name; and there was Tom in woollen cap and comforter. He had walked up to the city on some errand, it appeared, and was starting on his tramp home. The night was so fine, the old house so little out of my way that it seemed inhuman not to offer him



a lift. Of course he accepted. He clambered in by my side; and we went jingling away from gas-lights down towards the woodland and the open country to seaward.

Before long we were passing the cemetery where the snow for once hid the staring ugliness of the marble.

"That's growin'," said Tom, nodding towards the place. "It's 'bout the only thing in these parts that is. Times is dreadful hard. There was seven lyin' dead at one time last week up to the city, sir,—yes, seven at one time."

Who were they, I asked, chiefly for the sake of answering. He rattled off some names that meant nothing. One of the dead, he said, was a lady whom I had doubtless seen rowing down river with five children; she'd been twice divorced, he added, and was pretty nigh her third time; took in washin'. The others were less specific.

"Tell you who's had a stroke," he went on. "Th' old Cap'n. Yes, sir; you won't see no more o' Cap'n John Trefethen."

VOL. III.—22

So started he went on to tell me how the old gentleman had been brighter than ever this winter till one day last week, when he tumbled over in the post-office with an apoplexy.

"Ought to 'a been dead two days ago," said Tom, "but them Trefethens die awful hard. He's been lyin' there, not knowin' nobody, and breathin' so hard that you'd think they was haulin' in an anchor. Hear him 'cross the street. He's gettin' slim to-day though. Most likely his anchor'll get hauled in 'bout ten o'ck."

Why that hour, I asked.

"Tide turns," said Tom sententiously; and relapsed into silence, as we left the cemetery behind us and turned into a woody road, dark with evergreens even in the mid-winter. This led to the old house, and to little else. The lonely silence of the night, broken only by the jingle of our sleighbells, began to affect me in a way that I found uncanny. I was glad Tom was with me. I dreaded the solitary drive back. And I kept



"I think I heard the words—'You couldn't leave me, could you?'"

picturing to myself the white-headed old Captain, his sharp features softening into the dignity of death, in the little village beyond the creek.

At last we came to the gate of the old house. As we turned in, I could hear the surf breaking with massive laziness on the reefs beyond the harbor mouth. In the still cold night air the sound seemed strangely near, and fraught with some kind of intelligence. Tom lifted his head and listened.

"Tide's turnin'," he said.

As we drove on toward the house, I could see the creek and the little bay in its mouth were brimfull of ice-cakes, which stood out in ghostly relief against the granite rocks, dark for once in the midst of the whiteness about them. In an instant more, the old house rose grimly before us.

At one of the doors was a light.

"Some one has heard us coming," said I, relieved at this sign of life.

"My God!" whispered Tom. "Look there." He had clutched my arm and was pointing toward the door.

In the open door-way stood a young girl, the light streaming from behind her. But for all that her face was in shadow I could see, I know not how, the pitiful look with which she was peering into the night.

"It's Aunt Drusilly," said Tom, in awe-stricken tones strangely at variance with the careless way in which he had told me tales of the apparition.

The horse had stopped, snorting and shivering with what might be either cold or terror. As we looked in silence at the girl, I felt rather than saw a change come over her face. For an instant there was about her a great glow of joy. She stretched out her arms in welcome. She started forward. I think I heard the

words—"You couldn't leave me, could you?"

Then the cold star-light night was dark and empty again; the old house gray with no sign of life; and only the white snow about us, and the lazy surf beyond the harbor mouth, and the faint ring of sleigh-bells as our horse shivered in the darkness.

Tom spoke first.

"Old Cap'n's dead," he said.

VI

So it was. As the tide turned that night Captain John had drawn one quiet breath, and died. What his last thought was no one can rightly tell; but just as he died there came across his face a look of surprise and joy. It was on his features the next day when I saw him in his coffin.

That night is now a good while ago. The old house stands as it had stood since the days of His Excellency, growing grayer as the years begin to lengthen into centuries. But Drusilla has been seen no more. Just as the last vision of the dead governor faded out of his panelled hall when the crazy wench to whom he had been the grandest earthly figure faded from the earth, so when John Trefethen went out with the winter tide, the form of Drusilla, whom he could not make himself forget, faded from the post where she had watched through the forty years when she was to him a living memory. So as in the old house His Excellency's grand life and Drusilla's humble one passed in turn into memories they have passed now into dreams. And dreams they will be until the old house itself shall fade into a dream that shall no longer have potency to set men dreaming.

